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ABSTRACT

A renewed emphasis on arts education has come after a period of neglect during the 1980s and early 1990s when the arts were often slighted as school budgets grew tight and as educational priorities shifted to the basic academic subjects. Recently, results of several research studies have confirmed the advantages of student participation in arts education, according to the Arts Education Partnership. Today, there are many local and even some state initiatives that are true exemplars of the best that arts education can offer. But with the continuing focus on standards in the core academic subjects, some see little room for the arts. This policy update explains several issues to consider when advocating arts education: impact of the standards and assessments movement on arts education; alignment of standards and credit hour requirements; teacher training; equity; and partnerships. The policy update singles out two states, Maryland and Ohio, which are working to involve arts education in their efforts to bridge the gap between K-12 and higher education. It comments on two other states, Kentucky and Florida, which have created collaborative programs to engage arts resources in youth development. (BT)

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Arts Education

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Arts Education

Arts education—including the study of dance, music, theater, and the visual arts—has received increased attention at the state level in recent years, due in large part to national efforts to promote arts education, as well as to recent research citing increased academic and personal success as a result of engaging in the arts.

This renewed emphasis on arts education came after a period of neglect during the 1980s and early 1990s when the arts were often slighted as school budgets grew tight and as educational priorities shifted to the basic academic subjects, such as reading, mathematics, and science. The trend seemed to come to a head in 1989, when President Bush and the nation's governors laid out the National Education Goals at the historic summit in Charlottesville. There was no mention of the arts.

Work had already begun to reverse this trend. In 1988, the National Endowment for the Arts published *Toward Civilization*, which argued that the state of arts education in American schools was in distress and offered recommendations for improvement. This was followed by a wave of artistic activism and research studies into the benefits of arts education. In 1991, the National Assessment Governing Board approved the inclusion of the arts in the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Three years later in 1994, President Clinton added the arts to the National Education Goals and the National Arts Education Standards were released. During this time, a series of federal initiatives were launched to create sample assessment frameworks, encourage arts education research, and convene national meetings to promote arts education. The results of these research studies have confirmed the advantages of student participation in arts education; according to the Arts Education Partnership

- ★ students who actively engage in the arts outperform those who do not “on virtually every measure”;
- ★ the arts make a measurable difference in the lives of at-risk youth;
- ★ after-school arts programs help at-risk youth “toward positive behaviors and goals”;

- ★ arts education improves “critical thinking” abilities and outcomes; and
- ★ the arts provide educators with tools in which to effectively reach students.

Today there are many local—and even some state—initiatives that are true exemplars of the best that arts education can offer. Yet the overall place of the arts within the curriculum remains uncertain in many places. With the continuing focus on standards in the core academic subjects, some see there is little room for the arts. And some still ask, despite national arts standards, “Can you truly put standards to art, much less accurately assess student performance in the arts according to such standards?” For these reasons, states are not demanding the assessments—and therefore are often not providing the resources—that would put arts education on equal footing with other subjects.

Issues to Consider

- ★ **Impact of the standards and assessments movement on arts education.** As standards-based and whole-school reform efforts continue to sweep through the education system, proponents of many so-called “peripheral” subjects, such as art and physical education, have to fight for their place in the school day. But for arts proponents, that might not be the biggest challenge: they argue that the greatest hurdle arts education must overcome is high-stakes, standardized assessments. They say that until policymakers and the public are no longer obsessed with test scores and understand that one assessment simply cannot measure the range of human intelligence, arts education is at a severe disadvantage.
- ★ **Alignment of standards and credit hour requirements.** Because of difficulties in undertaking large-scale assessments in the arts, most states continue to rely on credit hour requirements, which are difficult, if not impossible to align with content standards. According to 1998 data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), nearly every state has adopted art

standards, and the vast majority have based them on the National Standards for Art Education. Yet fewer than 20 states have either assessed (Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, and Oklahoma) or planned to assess students in the arts; the remainder either declined to test entirely or left the task up to local districts. In such cases, efforts should be made at the state level to provide local districts with some sort of assessment framework by which to evaluate state arts content standards.

- ★ **Teacher training.** While many within artistic communities across the nation aid teachers and consider their professional development a top priority, there is still much that state policymakers can do. Although teacher training in the arts varies, many states employ distinct certification requirements for teachers who are art “specialists” and for those who are general classroom teachers. Unfortunately, certification requirements and assessments for specialists and generalists often do not promote quality comprehensive arts education. State policymakers could integrate arts into teacher certification by developing certification performance assessments that would test competence a) in teaching the arts for art “specialists” and b) in using instructional strategies that infuse the arts across the curriculum for instructors who teach general courses. Arts advocates believe that training should not end there, however, yet the NCSL data shows that hardly any states require professional development for their arts teachers.
- ★ **Equity.** Goals and standards for the arts are targeted toward all schools and students regardless of their backgrounds or socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, many districts facing revenue shortfalls are reducing funding for the arts or completely eliminating arts programs in order to meet tight budgets. At the same time, the arts are an area where resources have a particularly powerful influence on the production and quality of any given medium. Therefore, policymakers need to consider the effect that resources have on a school’s ability to help students meet rigorous standards in the arts.
- ★ **Partnerships.** As with other subject areas, there are many groups with a stake in arts education, such as representatives from higher education, business, state art agencies, independent arts organizations, and cultural institutions. By working together, these groups not only have the opportunity to enhance the arts education dialogue, but to increase the pool of resources and supporters of the efforts for comprehensive arts

education. State education policymakers should make an effort to work collaboratively with those who hope to improve arts education.

State Actions

Two states are making efforts to involve arts education in their efforts to bridge the gap between K-12 and higher education. The deans of both schools of education and schools of the arts were convened from all **Maryland** colleges and universities “to explore collaborative efforts in the arts for pre- and in-service teacher training. As a result, three campuses are developing programs at this time.” And in **Ohio**, a Joint Council of the department of education and the board of regents was formed in 1998 to create “a common set of learning expectations for graduating high school students.”

Representatives from various stakeholder groups in **Kentucky** created the 1994 Arts, Culture, and Technology plan, which is coordinated by the Kentucky Collaborative for Teaching and Learning and funded by the Annenberg Foundation. One important outgrowth of this plan is ongoing discussion of “coordinated efforts to provide comprehensive teacher professional development in the arts and a sensible mechanism through which arts resources can be engaged in the process of educating teachers and delivering instruction in the classroom.”

In **Florida**, the Arts Task Force and its offshoot, The Prevention Through the Arts Program, have brought together the departments of Education, State, and Juvenile Justice and Corrections with the Florida Association of Local Arts Agencies. The task force hosts the first statewide conference on “the arts role in youth development” this year; new partners include the Florida Parks and Recreation Departments, Florida Healthy Families Network, Big Brothers, and Big Sisters.

Resources

Arts Education Partnership, c/o Council of Chief State School Officers, One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-1431, (202) 326-8693, <http://aep-arts.org/aephome.html>.

The National Standards for Art Education can be viewed at the Kennedy Center’s ArtsEdge website at http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/professional_resources/standards/natstandards/index.html.

To view the NCSL data referenced in this Update, go to the organization’s online arts database at http://www.ncsl.org/programs/arts/artsed/artsed_intro.htm.



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